KNOXVILLE:

Regional ICE Hub

for Mass Detention + the Deportation Pipeline

Updated July 2026

A primer to keep ourselves safe + informed + active, without spreading panic or misinformation!

>1000%
increase in ICE detainees in Knox County jails from 2023 to 2025

3,500
ICE detainees held in Knox County jails in 2025

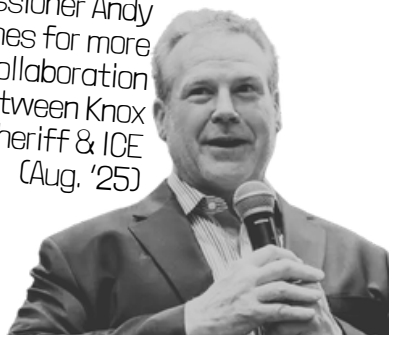
"The president's behind us... We are being told TN will go first."

Knoxville State Rep. Jason Zachary shares how TN will be a test ground for aggressive immigration laws (Jan. '25)

"I will stack these violators like cordwood in the Knox County jail until the appropriate federal agency responds."

Knox County Sheriff Jimmy "J.J." Jones on his detention plans after Knox County was initially denied ICE's 287(g) program in 2013

"I hope (287(g)) gets expanded."



Knox County Commissioner Andy Fox wishes for more collaboration between Knox Sheriff & ICE (Aug. '25)

ICE's Long Local History

ICE has been active in East TN for years. Recently, increased awareness has made its operations more visible to the general public.

- **2026**
  ICE raids **Hardin Valley** construction site next to a school.
- **2025**
  TN legislature allocates **$5M** to support local govt.s with 287(g) contracts.
- **2020**
  Sheriff Tom Spangler **renews 287(g)**.
- **2018**
  → ICE raids **Bean Station** meat-processing plant & detains almost 100 immigrants.
  → Knox County quietly begins detention **bed contract**, enabling local county jails to warehouse immigration detainees from across the region.
- **2017**
  Knox County becomes one of the first in TN to begin participating in voluntary **287(g)** program that allows local officers to carry out immigration duties for ICE. It is implemented unlawfully, without County Commission approval as mandated by state law.
- **2010**
  Knox County becomes 1st in TN to use **Secure Communities**, ICE's biometric info sharing program to enhance identification + removal of immigrants.
- **2009**
  Sheriff J.J. Jones applies for **287(g)** contract with ICE. The program was first established by Bill Clinton in 1996.
- **2008**
  100+ people arrested in ICE raids at poultry processing plant in **Chattanooga**.

And the Resistance

As long as there's been state violence, there's also been resistance. Some local examples:

2024

ICE Out of East TN relaunches and trains hundreds in **Migra Watch**, or community-led rapid response for monitoring and verifying ICE activity.

2019

AKIN, ICE Out of East TN, and Students for Migrant Justice launch a **Stop 287(g) Renewal** campaign directed at the Sheriff's Office, including "ICE On Trial" and other community engagements.

2018

Knoxville Immigrant Transit Assistance (**KITA**) forms as part of a national network supporting the immediate needs of immigrants traveling across the country. KITA remained active until the Greyhound Bus Station is sold in 2022.

2016

90 interfaith leaders along with community partners unite to advocate for **Tuition Equality** that would allow undocumented students to access higher-ed at in-state tuition rates instead of out-of-state rates.

2013

Stop 287(g) campaign is **successful** following rallies and demonstrations, PRA and FOIA submissions, meeting with Knox County Mayor and others, report to DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, faith letter to oppose 287g, and public forum w/ Sheriff (150+ attendees).

2011

Allies of Knoxville's Immigrant Neighbors (**AKIN**) and **Comité Popular** form.

2003

Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (**TIRRC**), a statewide, immigrant and refugee-led 501(c)(3) organization, is founded.

What is 287(g)?

There're only a few ICE officers for all 23 counties of East TN. However, "force multiplier" programs like 287(g) deputize local law enforcement to carry out immigration duties for ICE. **This significantly expands ICE's reach & capacity!** Here're the 3 types of 287(g) models used in Tennessee:

1. Warrant Service Officer (WSO): allows deputized officers to serve ICE warrants to people already in local jails. As of June '25, it also lets them transport detainees to ICE facilities.
2. Jail Enforcement Model (JEM): allows deputized officers to investigate potential immigration violations of people in jail & even initiate immigration proceedings against them.
3. Task Force Model (TFM): allows deputized officers to question people about their immigration status in the street & arrest them based solely on **suspected** immigration violations. Unsurprisingly, this model in particular has a history of racial profiling.

A Closer Look at KCSO + KPD

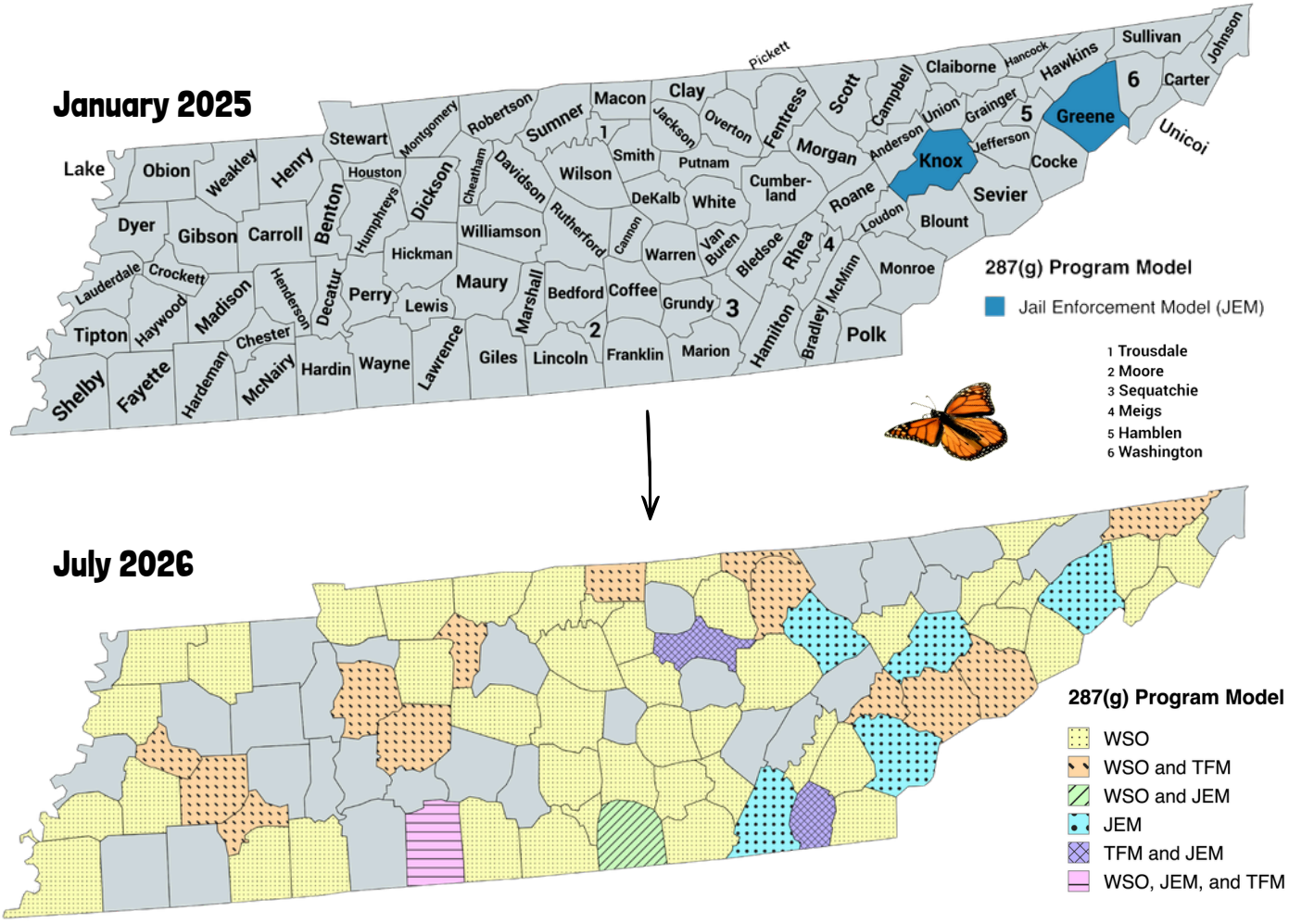
Knox County Sheriff's Office (KCSO), which manages the local jail system, has one 287(g) model — JEM.

Knoxville Police Department (KPD) does not have 287(g), so legally it may not carry out federal immigration duties. However, it still extends ICE's dragnet through its integration with federal databases (ie, NCIC) & cooperation with ICE. Policy requires KPD officers to hold individuals with civil immigration violations for 20 minutes until ICE arrives. If ICE doesn't arrive in that time, the individual may leave. In recent cases, though, KPD has held folks much longer than 20 minutes and even driven individuals to the local ICE office, directly leading to their deportation.

Adapted from the blog posts of Meghan Conley, PhD

Trump 2.0 + 287(g) Expansion

In Jan. '25, only two Tennessee counties had 287(g). By July '26, that number had exploded to 66 counties. State lawmakers passed HB 2219 in May'26, requiring every county to enter into a 287(g) agreement by 2027.



Counties in color indicate those with at least one type of 287(g) model. Counties in grey still honor ICE **detainers**, which allow their jails to voluntarily hold folks for 48 hours after release of their criminal charge. This gives ICE more time to come & pick up individuals that would otherwise be freed. In practice, some jails are over-compliant and have held individuals for ICE even longer than 48 hours.

Note: Several police dept.s have also entered into 287(g) TFM agreements. Additionally, two state agencies have 287(g) programs — Tennessee Highway Patrol (TFM) & the Tennessee Department of Correction (JEM).

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But what makes Knoxville the hub?

In addition to 287(g), Knox County has a **detention bed contract** that allows county jails to act as intermediate detention facilities.

The contract lets ICE use county jails to receive people on civil immigration charges (as opposed to criminal charges), which jails typically don't do. So, detainees from across East + Middle TN are funneled here because our jail can warehouse them before they're pushed further down the deportation pipeline.

The bed contract was quietly implemented in 2018, and Knox County remained the only TN county with this contract until 2025, when Putnam County signed its own.

ICE Detainees in Knox County Jail, 2018-2025
Meghan Conley, Ph.D.
Brought to the jail on local criminal charges
Brought to the jail pursuant to the bed contract
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
Most ICE detainees in Knox County Jail are not being picked up in Knox. They are brought here from other East/Middle TN counties because the jail's bed contract turns it into a regional, quasi ICE detention facility!
?
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
2026
ICE Intakes by Year

Data and info. adapted from the blog posts of Meghan Conley, PhD

Looking Ahead

Knoxville's ICE operations have largely avoided the shock-and-awe tactics used in Minneapolis and other big cities. Instead, the local removal pipeline flourishes outside the spotlight, insidiously. Banal bureaucratic procedures and contracts allow it to quietly terrorize & devastate East Tennessee's immigrant communities. We also expect its operations to pick up steam with the extra $75 billion the Big Ugly Bill gave ICE. The first step in disrupting the well-oiled deportation machine is making these bureaucratic gears visible. Here's what we're keeping an eye on:

- **Expansion of Knoxville's ICE Field Office:** ICE is currently looking for an 11,000 sq ft. office space. It has already expanded its search outside of Knox County in a second request for proposals.

- **Renewal of Detention Bed Contract**: Knox is among the only TN counties with a jail bed contract. Besides these couple of county jails, TN's only other facility for holding immigration detainees is the West Tennessee Detention Facility in Mason. So, renewing this contract is key to the regional deportation pipeline.

Adapted from the blog posts of Meghan Conley, PhD

Join Us: TAKE ACTION!

TODAY

- [x] Read this zine!
- [ ] Save the ICE Out of East TN's tip hotline to your phone: (865) 226-9052

THIS WEEK

- [ ] Share this zine with a friend!
- [ ] Keep reading. For starters, here're some things this zine <u>didn't</u> cover:
  - → Long history of inhumane conditions at local jails, including Knox County jails where immigration detainees are being held
  - → Knox County Commision's role in enabling the Sheriff
  - → National Crime Information Systems database's dragnet
  - → McGhee Tyson's role in moving detainees out of state

THIS MONTH

- [ ] Attend one of the following:
  - → An ICE Out training (@iceoutofetn on Instagram)
  - → An Allies of Knoxville Immigrant Neighbors (AKIN) meeting (@weareakin)
  - → A Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) event (@tnimmigrant, @tirrcvotes)
- [ ] Get to know your neighbors!
  - → As the State continues to fail us, we gotta keep each other safe!